



THE INDIGENIST TURN IN MAMANG DAI'S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Postcolonial studies have progressed with time. With the old concepts new concepts have been brought in. "The First People's Theory" is a recent concept of postcolonial studies. Indigenous culture all over the world which was almost erased by the Colonial rule are given importance and looked at anew through this theory. In India especially in Northeast India we have many tribal communities. The endeavor to represent and reclaim the history, identity and cultures of these different communities is the domain on which this theory works on. This is also what is called the process of decolonization. There is no doubt that change is an inevitable. Cultures all over the world go through this process of change. But there has to be continuity. The present should follow from the past and the future from the present. Mamang Dai belongs to the Aadi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. Though her works she reclaims her tribe's history and culture and explores her identity and roots. Her work also has a universal appeal. Her poetry can be taken as a quest to re-establish the roots of her culture and society and break the colonist's re-defined ideas and ideals about her tribe and for this she uses the colonizer's language as a tool. In this aspect she can be compared to writers like Pablo Neruda, Chinua Achebe and Derek Walcott.

KEYWORDS: Colonization, Decolonization, Post-colonial, Indigenous, Culture, Language

INTRODUCTION

In today's time Post-Colonial studies are inadequate with concepts like democracy, nationalism and citizen. Issues such as race, gender, ethnicity which are older concepts of community, individuals and nations need to be an integral part of post-colonial studies. Towards the end of the twenty-first century, post-structuralisms and post-modernist decentering thinking collide, and post-colonial theory challenges the Universalists' claim of literature focused on colonial experience from the perspective of the colonized toward the end of the twenty-first century. By portraying history, it aligns with colonial sympathies in principle and surrogates colonial meta-narratives with counter-narratives of resistance and dissent. It does so using techniques like as nativism, autonomy, cultural syncretism, hybridity, and absorption. Postcolonial theory evaluates cultural hierarchies in light of an anti-essentialist concept of identity. The objective is to recover the cultural melodies that have survived in the tribe's collective memory despite numerous attempts at erasure. Such endeavors construct alternate discourses in order to oppose the schemes of dominance that insist on colonial principles. The Post-Colonial paradigm has matured and begun to consider indigenous culture. Postcolonial studies, in general, stress on novel investigations of indigenous culture across the world, and in India in particular, it swings from Euro-centrism to strong voices advocating an Indo-centric subsistence style. The endeavor is undertaken to re-present and reclaim the cultural origins in all their uniqueness and subjectivity, free of colonial effects. Under these conditions, alternative narratives are being expanded at every corner of oppressed cultures in order to disrupt the hegemonic schemes imposed by colonialism.

The "First Peoples' Theory" in particular is a study of oral, vernacular, and regional literary cultures. It is current and politically relevant. This is known as the 'indigenist turn.' It is linked to social, political, and legal movements advocating for aboriginal rights, land rights, welfare, and acknowledgement. It is the literature of the exploited, the culture of resistance, and the culture of regeneration. Indigenous cultures are defined by their conflicts with other civilizations. It is confined, regionally constrained, and based in very specific histories. The literature of the "First Peoples" is an endeavor not only to restore their traditions, but also to ensure that modernity, particularly colonial modernism, is an exploitative instrument by which some cultures that have been neglected or even extinguished might be restored. Questions of home and homeland become highly significant in 'First Peoples' cultural activities. Home is more than a cliché. It highlights the displacement of 'First Peoples' from and within which their cultural practices arose. This is what is called decolonization which is the real need of the time. Decolonization is about cultural, psychological and economic freedom. It is about removing all vestiges of colonialism. We have to recover our past traditions and cultures and establish them firmly and proudly.

The study of indigenous cultures is vital because it represents our country's intricacies and divides. It is our past. It is an analytical technique that may be applied across cultures, locations, and, in certain cases, profoundly different human experiences. It is a change agent. The dedication to social transformation is demonstrated by the study of indigenous cultures. Its study can assist us in bringing about a life of justice, empowering the powerless, and speaking for those who have

been denied a voice. It is the recognition of power. There is no doubt that cultural change is inevitable and there is bound to be a process of evolution' Culture needs to grow and cannot stop at a particular time. . Culture needs to be dynamic and move with the changing times. But it is important for the continuity to be there otherwise our identity and roots will be at stake.

This study will attempt to investigate how Mamang Dai's work fits within the 'indigenist turn' of Post-Colonial philosophy. She is an Adi from Arunachal Pradesh, and her hometown is Pasighat. Arunachal Pradesh's literary legacy is oral tradition. The literatures of the groups, excluding Buddhists, are referred to together as the "Tani" group. They are thought to be descended from a single progenitor. They also have a corpus of literature that tells the tale of history, migration, the genesis of the universe, and the creation of man. It is the oral tradition that has fostered them. It has seen every ceremony and customary behavior. The oral narratives have inspired and affected Mamang Dai immensely. Her reaction to her myths and history resembles a journey, a quest for one's cultural identity, and may be likened to Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." (Bunyan, 2023)

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The methodology which will be followed in the research will be an analytical one. So, it will use the theories and ideas already existing. The work will have a particular theory or approach, i.e. the post-colonial theory. The paper will be analyzed through "The First Peoples Theory" which is an aspect of postcolonial studies and which is current and politically relevant. Decolonization which also comes under the domain of post-colonialism is also brought in. A particular poet of North East is taken. The subject area of this paper will be "Postcolonial study of North East Indian English Poetry". The methodology will be a critical study of the poetry of Mamang Dai. It will be an intensive and extensive library work. So, it will include study of all related works, articles, journals, magazines, websites and critical reviews done by scholars.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Dai, North East literature is varied, and each writer writes in an own style. Dai also writes on things that can happen everywhere and have no discernible cultural stamp. That is why her works are universally appealing. Her poetry's recurring topics include geography, topography, regret for the past, and changes in tribal society. Dai can be considered a pioneer in investigating the environment and history of her region, not only from the north east but also from India. After white men arrived in Arunachal Pradesh in 1912, the region saw tremendous development. Tribal theology, which was also ecological, flourished and still exists in the middle of the lush flora. . She likes epic stories and mythologies. Dai expertly blends history, memory, desire, and religion and surroundings. Poetry for Dai evolves throughout time, but the core of poetry remains constant. She is devoted to her poetry and its qualities.

Dai's writing may be described as a journey. It is an alternative to the realities enslaved by western dominance and imperialism. Her writings might also be classified as subversive since they challenge established cultural or ideological standards. It

opposes prevailing racial ideology, the history, society, culture, language, and geography of non-western or formally colonized nations. Subversion is thus the natural and unavoidable result of the decolonizing process in post-colonial writing in reaction to colonial oppression. Colonial literature may conceal facts and spread harmful propaganda. Subversion is a political rebuilding tool. Colonialism is an agency which that seeks to establish the colonists' predefined ideals and ideas. They take advantage of indigenous cultural matrices and struggle to continue their ventures in the name of money, riches and profits.

When one reads the poetry of post-colonial poets like Pablo Naruda, Derek Walcott and Mamang Dai, we will find that their work is deeply rooted in nature. We find them preoccupied with nature and they use symbols, motifs and images from nature. Through them they express the colonial experiences and weaken its power. We can say, maybe, through the references to nature they try to make the post-colonial subjects conscious of their often unsure or uncertain identities with a physical space and bring forth the multiculturalism experiences of the people. This connection to nature and the geography of the place has also a lot to do with the past and history of the place. The poets want to deconstruct the Eurocentric interpretation of history. They revisit, reinterpret and recover history in order to understand how the colonial past had shaped the post-colonial present.

Mountains are incredibly essential in poetry. They are the link between nature and society. They are encircled by mythology and folklore. Her paintings reveal her ongoing spiritual search for her "Homeland." She has observed the misery of insurgents. Therefore she fantasizes of a calm utopia. Nature was disrupted by the continuous struggles of insurgency. The economic embargo had an impact on her hometown. These were the people of Arunachal Pradesh's fates. Dai was firmly planted in her native soil. She is in sync with nature. The components of nature represent people's ongoing relationship with the environment. The battle for the preservation of their communities follows a set of guidelines. The inhabitants of the North East desire to live in harmony. Arunachal Pradesh is the greenest state in the country. Indigenous religion and customs have persisted in their original form, maybe due to their remoteness and historical isolation. Their faith in nature is deep, and they are environmental champions. In her mind, the mountains represent both optimism and terror in an increasingly complex and changing world. The tribes understand how their lives are connected with nature, which has been passed down to them via ancient customs. Their entire life is based on nature. As acclaimed historian Ramachandran Guha (Guha, 2013) pointed out, people in the west overlooked the traditional social and cultural norms of the region. People are removed from land in the name of wildlife conservation. However, this is not the case in the east. Local communities have a close connection to their surroundings

There is also a deep bond between women and environment. Women have a deep relationship with nature and are most affected by changes in the ecology. Dai's poetry demonstrates how powerful stories and folklore revolve around mountains, hills, and rivers. They believe in the sanctity of nature. The

evergreen forest provides plants with therapeutic characteristics and products for cottage enterprises. Everything in nature has life for the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Dai claims that the mountain and women are significant. Nature's elements of all kinds give them strength to overcome loneliness and anxiety. They may both be gone as time passes. Dai is concerned that if the tribes are removed from their native habitat, they would perish. Dai is alert and on guard with the process of modernism and feels threatened that the perennial rituals and traditions will be lost in this process. So for the continuity of being connected with the past is very important. So for her oral traditional, memory are through which the traditions myths and beliefs can be kept alive.

Dai's writing depicts Arunachal Pradesh as a metaphysical environment. Through her work she restores the beauty and values of Arunachal Pradesh's cultural past. Colonialism has a disastrous moral and social impact. She helps the world hear her voice by providing genuine and poignant descriptions of pre-independent and post-independence images as well as asserting the identities of the Adi and other Arunachal races. Dai, like Achebe, depends on her tribe's oral heritage. Her folklore and mythology mirror the customs of her day in her writings. She, like Achebe, employed English, but her subject matter and narratives are non-colonial. One of the most common theme of post-colonial literature is the struggle over language. Language was nothing but a tool of oppression in the hands of the colonizers. So it was necessary to bring forth the colonial experiences subjectivity through this powerful language. This act of using the language of the colonizers to criticize the whole process of the act of colonialism is in itself a kind of rebellion and resistance. The post-colonial poets do not follow the standard rules of the English language. They in fact reinvent the language and make it their own. They insert new native words and local expression. They in fact reinvent the language and the syntax. They make it their own and apt to express their sense of 'otherness.' A poetic syntax is developed to articulate the uncertainties, the duality and their cultural in-betweenness. One can write in the language of the former colonial masters. As Gareth Griffiths points out in his book "A Double Exile: African and West Indian writing between two cultures", the post-colonial writers are exiled by landscape they write about and exiled by landscape from the language they are using. It is a double edge irony. (Singha, 2020) As a result, she employs it as a potent instrument. Being from the North-east, the issues of language and identity plays an important part in her work. Though the question of writing in English has been debated on by many critics, the writers are no longer concerned with it. The writer's from this region has skillfully manipulated the English language to their own need and are using it to express their regional and traditional experiences. Her works textualizes the Adi tribe's cultural identity. There was a quick transformation after the arrival of the white people. Everywhere, the colonial experience was a methodical emasculation of culture. The western education isolates one from one's myth and communal legends. Dai's poetry demonstrate that one can only have identity and existence if one remains rooted in one's land and holds on to one's story and heritage. Oral history in Arunachal flourished long before colonial powers arrived. The inhabitants

of Arunachal spoke their own language. The colonial powers adopted the written language and established it as superior to the spoken language. The colonial forces built this in order to erase the past before they took control. They intended to demonstrate that it was with them that the history of the places they conquered began. The concept of language is the beginning point for colonists in explaining their so-called civilizational goal. Language transmits culture, and culture carries the full set of values through which we understand ourselves and our role in the world, notably via oral tradition and literature. According to research, the colonists relied heavily on the linguistic system to support their colonial regime. The British colonial ideology worked hard in every nation to eradicate traditions, values, and belief systems through language. Arunachal has an actual history as well as an oral history. Oral genres such as myths, tales, stories, songs, proverbs, riddles, sayings, and so on are all part of oral tradition. Retelling and repetition are the foundations of oral tradition. It can also be found in non-literate communities. It gets its basic ingredients from people's cultures, which are made up of life, values, and philosophy. Values are transferred; changes in values occur when the man-social and man-environmental values change. According to Ruth Fennig, oral literature must be learned and it is not difficult to learn because it is rhythmic. The works of Dai reveal the depth and breadth of Arunachal's knowledge, pride, and ethical heritage.

Memory plays a significant role in postcolonial literature. Dai also investigates communal memories, societal traumas, and individual voices by diving deeply into historical memory. She challenges the official memory of India by constructing a counter-memory of Arunachal Pradesh. She promotes a cultural connection to the environment. Memory is always searching, gathering, and creating again. Our knowledge and identity are derived from our recollections, and we frequently reconstruct and revisit the past. When it comes to creating or forming an identity, memory is crucial. She bemoans the lack of historical documentation of her area and believes that her poems will serve as the last remaining proof of the state's vanished or deteriorating legacy.

CONCLUSION

Similar to other poets of the postcolonial movement, Dai's poetry addresses the changing notions of what it means to write in a language and culture that have been shaped by colonial history, at a period when the colonial power's influence and violence are still felt. Dai is from northeastern India, therefore issues with language and India will inevitably arise in her writing. She writes from a place where identity issues and conflict are prevalent. She breaks down the power dynamics in the usage of English and incorporates the customs of her community into the English language. She admits that the tribal and local cultures have influenced her work.

Her poetry conveys not only her own unique poetic traits but also the story of the people living in the area as a whole. She investigates the use of folklore or conventional local knowledge. Images of intangible cultural elements including music, customs, myths, local languages, and landscapes

abound. She incorporates the ethereal realm of spirits, God, and Goddesses into her poems. In every poem she writes, the usage of folklore serves as an ancestor's thread to the core of the local way of life, as we are informed about customs like dance and hunting. As a gesture of communal identification, she restores the old tribal values and purges the wonder area of the brutality it has endured. During the colonial and postcolonial periods, the North East was portrayed as being deficient in social, economic, and political terms. People were portrayed as having a low intellectual level. It is writers like Dai who are bringing to light the true nature of the North East tribes. Writers who are comfortable with the English language and the European literary heritage and utilize them to convey to the world what the North East truly is. Not just among the rest of the world, but even in India, there is a negative perception of the North East. So we need writings like Dai's to remove it. We must communicate our odd situation clearly and successfully and elicit an emotional response from our readers. Dai's writing is smooth and enthusiastic and she has really put North East in the world map through her writings.

Numerous English-language Indian poetry have shown the slow degradation of the ecosystem and ecology. Mamang Dai's English-language poems honour the northeastern region's natural splendour. We must understand that there are several elements in the intricate web of influences that have influenced the regional cultural customs of the ethnic groups in Northeast India in order to place her work in context. These multiethnic locations are home to several officially recognised ethnic groups. The Protestant and Catholic Christian sects were introduced by the British colonial tradition, which began in 1826. There have been several historical and prehistoric migrations from China and South Asia to the northeastern part of India. The region was annexed by India in 1947; as a result, the Indian English poets of the North East wrote poems on themes of nationhood, identity, insurgency, ethnic violence, bureaucratic corruption, exile, memory, and home. Other themes included isolation from other parts of India and from neighboring countries.

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